

'A Nation Set in Stone'

Insight into the Politics of Statuary in Delhi (1950-65)

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How was the narrative of the modern nation state being instituted in the city space of Delhi in the first two decades of Independence? A study of the Lok Sabha debates of that period helps in understanding the ways in which the city's space was being imagined to portray the "nation". The sense of a new visual order was gradually being imposed on the old colonial one by changing the insignia around the same object without fundamentally altering the structure. Indeed, the transformations were somewhat chaotic and pulled in several directions at the same time. This paper attempts to trace these confusions and contradictions in the initial years of Independence.

This paper looks at the transfer of power from a colonial empire to a postcolonial nation and how it translated into the lives of the objects that went on to become the emblems of our nationhood which in turn often transformed the nature of these emblematic objects themselves. I focus on the process of delinking these objects from their colonial "pre-histories" and embodying them in the "glorious history" of the Indian national movement. In the course of this process, monuments like the Red Fort, the India Gate, the Parliament House and the Rashtrapati Bhavan have become the key objects through which the nation's story is told and retold and also forgotten. The images of these objects are circulated through various forms, whether as images in the primary school textbooks or through the nationalist songs aired on Doordarshan with fleeting images of these objects or through popular calendar art. These images therefore become emblems of the nation, embodying the "spirit" of the nation within them. These images together, and in isolation have been inscribed with the idea of the nation in them. The works of Christopher Pinney, Kajri Jain and Patricia Uberoi on calendar art on the other hand show that these images take on very different and imaginative forms in the popular domain.¹ Scholars have already argued that these images acquire a life of their own in print culture or other kinds of mass culture as they undergo several kinds of mutations to create different visual fields which are somewhat autonomous from the official narrative of India's decolonisation.

Mapping the Visual

This paper foregrounds the questions of space by mapping these emblematic objects of the British Empire and their passage into the postcolonial nation state which led to a definite shift in their meaning through a visual field that is fantastic, lending meaning to the colonial state at first and later the post-colonial state. Broadly speaking, therefore, the attempt here would be to understand the process of the visual production of the nation in general and its capital in particular through space. Mapping this visual production of the nation through these transformations, each of the objects like the Red Fort, National Museum and the larger space of Lutyens' Delhi and performances like that of Republic Day, I believe, would be productive in terms of locating the tensions that the postcolonial state was going through. The way official nationalism has come into place, it seems as a uniform, homogeneous and static despite being heterogeneous, contested and perpetually

I wish to acknowledge Rajarshi Dasgupta for his insightful comments on this paper.

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in flux. It is precisely these transformations and contestations over defining a nationalist landscape that one can see a different story unfolding. Lutyens' visual production of Delhi with its specific arrangement of these objects created a totalising spectatorship for the colonised subject. Paradoxically, the same objects, after Independence, had to reflect the power and authority of the new nation state. Instead, these objects stood as rebukes to the new nation. The larger attempt therefore was to erase their colonial past and nationalise them. This generally involved changing their names and at times removing the outright markers of colonial history and re-appropriating the space as an administrative centre of a democratic, free country. The sense of a new visual order was gradually being imposed on the old one by changing the insignia around the same object without fundamentally altering the structure. Indeed, the transformations were somewhat chaotic and pulled in several directions at the same time. This paper attempts to trace these very confusions and contradictions in the initial years of Independence.

In this narrative of postcolonial Delhi, it is the colonial past which provides the necessary background as to how the city was "transferred" and transformed as the capital city of an independent nation. It is the moment of independence which seems to have changed the significance of all these structures by changing not just the nature of the city, but also these "objects". Delhi was no longer a capital of a British colony, but the capital of a nation which had just won its independence after a difficult and long-standing struggle. Though there was little attempt to decide or discuss the changes required in the power structure of the country in the way the British had envisaged it, these discussions on the cityscape often took place in fragments in Parliament or within and amongst the civic bodies in Delhi. One major reason for the fragmentary nature of the discourse concerning the changing nature of the city-space of Delhi was the fact that no single body of the government was solely responsible for Lutyens' Delhi. The responsibilities were (and still are) divided in a complicated manner across bodies like the Central Public Works Department (hereafter CPWD) and New Delhi Municipal Corporation (hereafter NDMC). As a result, these changes were happening at the bureaucratic level, in a more or less disparate way without any clear articulation of what Lutyens' Delhi as a whole should come to signify. These transformations were of course taking place in a larger sociopolitical context where they were often remoulded and recast by the results of specific events.

Changing the Crown

Therefore, the transformations cannot be seen as largely charted along the borderline between the colonial and postcolonial forms of representation. Rather, both the colonial and postcolonial forms of representations of power must be understood as fragmented from within while also retaining several continuities. Indeed, the changes were at times so marginal that the symbolic changes could not transform the visual effect of the Central Vista. As we would see, the attempt to generate a new symbolic register was fraught with disagreements among the leaders of the nation, as there was never a single conception

of what the nation should be ever in the history of the Indian nationalist movement. This paper looks at how objects like the statues of British colonisers came to shape the debate as to how the capital city must reflect the ethos of the new nation.

In a newly independent country with no policy on urban restructuring in place, these symbols of the British Empire had to be imbued with a different meaning. To consider an illustrative example, it is significant that although the gilded crowns on public buildings were removed, the stone crowns which formed an integral part of the four Dominion Pillars in the Great Court between the secretariats were not broken (Gupta 1994: 265). Though they remain intact and unaltered, they have been systematically erased from the memory of the people.²

Apart from the actual historical process of building infrastructure within the capital city by constructing or reclaiming such emblematic structures through reconstructions, the parliamentary debates are a particularly revealing source with respect to the enormous weight the nation's leaders placed on deliberating the aesthetics and purposes of these structures. Whether it was the Delhi Public Library which had to be "capital worthy", or the design and structure of the new Supreme Court building or the design of the Rajghat, all these aspects were discussed in great detail in Parliament.³ The question of building these structures never remained stuck merely at the level of their practical utility, but also encompassed how they would reflect the ethos of the new modern nation state.

No less important to our national leaders were the aesthetic sensibilities embodied in the Central Vista, the responsibility for which vested in the CPWD, which was tasked with erecting new buildings to house the new ministries. However, unhappy with the CPWD's poor sense of aesthetics, Nehru decided that this task should be overseen by a Central Vista Committee (Gupta 1994: 262). The Delhi Public Library was entrusted with popularising the aims and objectives of the First Five-Year Plan through exhibitions, film shows and meetings.⁴ The Delhi Public Library's programmes became part of the new kind of didactic discourse which informed the people about the five-year plan which was initiated with tremendous enthusiasm.

Frequent questions regarding the progress of works on sites like the Rajghat, the National Museum and the Sahitya Kala Akademi, removal of statues from the colonial era which were deemed unsuitable as well as changing the names of the roads in the capital were raised in Parliament between 1950 and 1970, reflecting the anxiety and urgency among the national leaders regarding how the space of the capital city ought to represent the new nation.

However, we look at these transformations from the perspective of what these do to the physical space of Delhi. How was the city space used to convey the new ethos of the new nation? How were these emblematic objects transformed, which of these emblems were retained and which dispensed with and why?

The Heavy Weight of the Statues

Among all of the debates surrounding the question of erasing the colonial mark from the cityscape, the removal of statues of colonisers which occupied central locations in the city were the

most fiercely debated. For example, while a statue of Willingdon stood tall in the South Block, the statues of Hardinge and Guy Fleetwood Wilson were to be found at important places in Delhi and a statue of queen Mary stood inside the Town Hall in Old Delhi.⁵ Not just in the city, therefore, but in the corridors of power, the Central Vista, especially the Parliament House, were full of several such statues. In the post-Independence era, the presence of statues of personalities such as Reading, Irwin and Chelmsford in Parliament complex were taken to be rude reminders of the humiliation of the country's colonisation. One of the parliamentarians, N G Ranga even exclaimed "what sin has the Parliament House and Parliament House as a whole committed that they should be surrounded by a number of these statues?"⁶ The most prominent such reminder, however, was the massive statue of king George V, which was designed by Lutyens and placed close to the India Gate under a huge sandstone canopy. The presence of such humiliating reminders of colonial times chafed on the sensibilities of our national leaders. In almost every session of question hour in the Lok Sabha between 1950 and 1970, questions were asked by parliamentarians across party lines as to what was to be done with the statues in the Parliament House complex. On 13 May 1957, Jawaharlal Nehru formulated the position which would go on to become the general policy on the question of statues, stating:

I was venturing, Sir, to place before the House what the general policy of Government is in regard to this question of statues put up during the period of the British rule in various parts of India. There are various kinds of statues; some may be considered historical, some may be considered artistic and some may be considered, well, rather offensive in themselves, and of various types. Our general attitude has been, first of all, to remove such as might be considered offensive, and that too, gradually without making too much fuss and without doing anything to raise ill will between countries. We have removed some of those statues and we propose to continue doing that. There are those which have been historically significant without causing offence; we shall also remove them and put them in historic museums. There are those that are not important historically or artistically. I do not know what we will do with them; if somebody else wants them, we will make a present of them. In particular, regarding such statues as may be considered in a sense offensive to our national sentiment, we have taken them up and we do propose to take them up; but we wish to do all this in a manner so as not to create international ill will and raise up old questions which are dead and gone.⁷

Nehru's Nonchalance

Nehru, in order to retain a rational policy towards this problem, had suggested in a note to the union home minister that these statues be put in various groups (1) those that have some historical importance, (2) those that have artistic importance, (3) those which have neither historical nor historic importance, and (4) those which are offensive to Indian sentiment.⁸ He further wrote that the statues that offend national sentiments could be removed at the earliest and placed in an open space around a museum. This entire distinction that Nehru created among three different kinds of statues proved to be absolutely inefficacious. The confusion therefore prevailed. The Members of Parliament (MPs) – many of them from the Indian National Congress – would ask questions in order to ascertain how many of such statues had already been removed and enquired

as to a target date by when they would all be removed from the city and Parliament. Parliamentarians such as Ram Krishan Gupta, Radha Raman, Iqbal Singh, H V Kamath, S M Banerji, Bhakt Darshan,⁹ Rammanohar Lohia and Madhu Limaye put forth these questions, often in groups, on several occasions. The ministers replying to such questions would generally cite unavailability of space as a reason for lack of rapid action on this front.¹⁰ The other defence that was provided by the government was that most of these statues were not of the "offensive type" as is clear from Nehru's statement above. Such replies would usually state that the "inoffensive" statues would be shifted as soon as the National Museum was created.

Indeed, the debates after 1960 clearly indicate a sense of impatience regarding the government's nonchalance. Mehr Chand Khanna (the then minister of construction, housing and urban development) and Gulzarilal Nanda (the then minister of home affairs), in the 1960s were constantly accused of giving evasive answers on this issue by several people including Rammanohar Lohia, Yashpal Singh and H V Kamath.¹¹ The minister in charge would usually evade the question by answering that these issues would come under the ambit of the state government.¹² However, the presence of such statues within the premises of Parliament House itself made the question more difficult to answer. The two viceregal busts which were at the erstwhile Great Place (now known as Vijay Chowk) were removed quite early and remained the only statues to have been removed for a very long time. Alongside this, there were similar discussions on installing new statues of nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Swami Shraddhanand, etc. Nehru was strongly opposed to changing famous and historical names of roads or structures which have a strong distinction of their own. For a very long time (indeed, almost till the mid-1960s), the only two statues of nationalist leaders that had come up were that of Sardar Patel and Motilal Nehru.¹³

Narayani Gupta argues that the road on which Birla House (the site of Gandhi's assassination) is located was renamed Tees January Marg so as to commemorate Gandhi without directly invoking his name.¹⁴ Gupta quotes Nehru as having said that "if these tendencies are not checked, we shall have thousands of roads and squares named after Gandhiji. That will not contribute either to convenience or the glory to Gandhiji" (Gupta 1994: 262). The site of his assassination also became a hugely debated one. The government was not very keen on acquiring the Birla House which was owned by the Birla family. The government constantly argued that private property could not be acquired because it was a private property. Many parliamentarians suspected the truthfulness of this statement. In a long-drawn-out debate on 24 November 1965, Mani Ram Bagri alleged:

My question is that the way Guru Tegh Bahadur's place of martyrdom was commemorated in a foreign land, the way Ram, Krishna and other great people's places of martyrdom was commemorated, then can the Government cite a reason that in their own country the site of martyrdom of the Father of the Nation cannot be commemorated? Actually the Government is sold out to the Birlas.¹⁵

There was a clear conflation of Gandhi with religious importance in Bagri's statement. His religious significance comes out

more clearly in Kapur Singh's question in the same debate regarding the government's intention to give "any shape or form to the name or person of Mahatma Gandhi into the *sacred religious lore* of India".¹⁶ For them therefore, it was not just defining the place of the nation, but defining the place of the nation as sacred, as holy in the religious sense of the term. Birla House was supposed to be another important place in this new kind of sacred geography that was being imagined. Gandhi's site of martyrdom was therefore being compared to that of "great people" like Ram and Krishna. It was not the secular, rational mode of place making that Nehru and others would have wanted. Their hopes and aspirations of the nation and the making of the place of the nation were markedly different.

It was partly because of Nehru's formulation of the general policy on removal of statues that the statues of Irwin, Reading and Chelmsford remained there till Nehru's death.¹⁷ The statues of general Taylor, general Jack Nicholson, queen Mary and king George (from the President Estate), Willingdon, and Hardinge were removed around the same period. The statue of Irwin was removed after it was mutilated by some activists of the United Socialist Party.¹⁸ The statues of king Edward and queen Victoria remained for some time in Old Delhi, but were later removed. Some of these statues were sent to the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta or the Royal School in Northern Island.¹⁹ The majority of them were kept in the exhibition grounds till such time as the Coronation Park was ready.²⁰ The statue which remained in its original position for the longest time was the colossal statue of George V which was placed under a huge sandstone canopy in the India Gate area.

Growing Demands for Statues

What comes across in these debates is the clearly divided opinion that the MPs held over this issue. While modernists like Nehru were for a rational, well thought out policy on how to deal with these statues, the larger body of the elected MPs wanted to do away with all the bearers of imperial insignia. This was consistent with Nehru's long-standing objection to such commemorative statues. It was with the issue of commemorative statues that this debate became even murkier. There were demands pouring in from various groups and communities to institute statues of their "great leaders". Nehru's stand is most clearly articulated in his response to a decision taken by the Lok Sabha on a proposal sent by Komarraju Achamamba (a Congress member of the Lok Sabha) to the Lok Sabha Secretariat to install a life size bronze statue of the "Dandi march type" of Mahatma Gandhi on a pedestal in the Central Hall of the Parliament House. He wrote,

I am much distressed by this resolution and I have informed the speaker accordingly. I do not like the idea of any statue of Mahatmaji in Parliament House. I object even more to such a statue being put up in Central Hall.²¹

By late August 1947 a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi had been unveiled by the then president, Rajendra Prasad, in the Central Hall.²² The first statue to come up was that of Motilal Nehru in the year 1963 with Gopal Krishna Gokhale's bust and

B R Ambedkar's statue following in the year 1966 and 1967 respectively. The next statue to come up in the Parliament complex was that of Gandhi in 1993. To install new statues in the city, suggestions ranged from Bhagat Singh to Swami Shraddhanand to Maharana Pratap. By 1968, the statues of Asaf Ali, Deshbandhu Gupta, Lokmanya Tilak and G B Pant were placed in various parts of the city.²³ Nehru was equally opposed to commemorating buildings or institutes with his own name. In a response to two letters sent to him by Shri Ranjan, the vice chancellor of Allahabad University, expressing his wish to name the University Library building after Nehru, the latter wrote:

I really do not understand why you should want to attach my name to the University library. Personally, I do not much approve of this practice, more particularly, in using names of living persons. Long ago, when I was Chairman of the Municipal Board (1923-25), I got the Board to pass a resolution to this effect. Unfortunately, after I ceased to be the chairman, they forgot about the resolution and named all kinds of roads after some of their own members. One has to give a lead in such matters and I have, therefore been trying to prevent people from attaching my name to a building. I must confess that I have not always been successful. I hope, however, that you will come to my help in this matter.²⁴

The divide between Nehru and the rest of the Indian National Congress on this issue is very apparent from these letters and debates. Nehru's modernism probably made him wary of personality cults and it is likely that this may be the reason why no central policy was instituted in the 1950s to fund statues in the country. The question of new statues of leaders of Indian national movement was always made subject to the availability of sponsors and adequate space. No human being, including Mahatma Gandhi could be celebrated through naming or commemorating. It was only after Nehru's death that the figure of Mahatma Gandhi could consensually stand as the symbol of Indian Independence when the debate on the canopy took place. For an arch-modernist like Nehru, the apotheosis of an individual was quite unacceptable. During one of the Lok Sabha debates, Nehru commented that in India, statues had historically been put up of gods and not of human beings.²⁵ An Advisory Committee on the Installation of Statues was constituted in August 1965 with members from the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and several important members of the NDMC, the MCD and the CPWD to consider various proposals from groups of people ready to finance the installation of such statues.²⁶ Once passed by the committee, it could be installed by the group at the prescribed place according to the given measurement. It is probably due to the emotive nature of such demands that the State took a limited responsibility for erecting new statues.

Due to the vast divide between Nehru's firm stand on this issue and the sentiments of most parliamentarians, the Lok Sabha debates on questions of statues of nationalist leaders and colonialists became quite emotive and theatrical. A certain parliamentarian demanded that a memorial be set up for Swami Shraddhanand at the Clock Tower in Chandni Chowk, which was the site of his martyrdom.²⁷ Proposed by a group called Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Samaj, it was clear, that

usually these demands were not based on the whims and fancies of the parliamentarians but were rooted in strong demand base among the people.²⁸ However, this was initially turned down on the grounds that it would lead to traffic congestion. The committee, or the central government, did not make any effort to directly involve itself in such endeavours. C K Bhattacharya asked in Parliament “Is not the particular place where the late Swamiji bared his breast before the British Bayonets a suitable space?”²⁹ The statue of Shradhdhanand again became a recurring topic in Parliament. It was realised very early on that the government’s involvement in the putting up of these statues would lead to chaos and to the government’s stand being questioned constantly. The demand to establish a memorial for Swami Shradhdhanand in Chandni Chowk could have led to serious discord between interested parties and the government, had the latter taken full responsibility to build memorials. Much later, however, a site was allocated for the statue within the precincts of the Town Hall after the removal of queen Mary’s statue.

Modifying the Monuments

However, the question of removal of the British statuary was far less contentious than that of instituting new ones in the city. There was hardly any consensus among most parliamentarians on this issue, and as a result it was hotly debated in Parliament throughout the 1960s. The Home Ministry would have to field queries or there would be suggestions to build a memorial site for soldiers killed in the Indo-China war and Indo-Pak war and for a memorial for the national movement frequently. At other times, the omission of certain leaders from the list of proposed statues would be contested. On the question of the memorials, a suggestion was made to turn the India Gate into a tomb for the “unknown warrior”.³⁰ However, this was turned down by the minister of state in the Ministry of Defence, A M Thomas on the grounds that the India Gate could not be modified due to a commitment made by the Government of India to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. This led to quite a few ruffled feathers in Parliament. In asserting the nationalists stand on this contentious issue, H N Mukherjee said:

The Minister said a little while ago that it was a Government to Government agreement in regard to whatever is the memorial-India Gate and all that sort of thing. We are not only a successor of that Government but also a free government which has liberated itself from the colonial yoke and in those conditions, is it not desirable for Government to consider whatever agreement was entered into by the British Indian Administration with the UK Government in those days as obsolete and to utilise the structures which are there for some purpose more worthy and more apposite to our present circumstances?³¹

Mukherjee’s statement stands as a classic example of the concerns of the leaders of the postcolonial society. These magnificent pieces of architecture, built in the heydays of the British period, could not be broken down and at the same time could not be retained in their original meaning. To “utilise” these structures for purposes more “worthy” and more “apposite” to the country’s circumstances became a concern and matter of regular debate in Parliament. The All India War

Memorial was built to commemorate the dead soldiers of the first world war and the Afghan wars. It was a symbol of Britain and India’s inseparability. The archway spanned the same processional route that passed from Baker’s Secretariats to the Dominion Columns (Johnson 2008: 479). Built on the lines of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris by the Imperial War Graves Commission and Lutyens, it came to be an important structure on the eastern axial point of the new capital. In 1971, during Indira Gandhi’s regime, the Amar Jawan Jyoti (the Indian version of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier) came up at the site of the India Gate as a tribute to the soldiers who died in the two Indo-Pak wars and the Indo-China war. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the site of the erstwhile All India War Memorial was anything but coincidental. It was an attempt to not merely commemorate the dead, but also an effort to inscribe the postcolonial movement in the same monument. The presence of the Amar Jawan Jyoti under the arch of the monument lends a nationalist meaning to it which could not have been achieved merely by changing its name to “India Gate”. These new modalities of transforming these colonial structures therefore were aimed at ironing out the inchoate and the incongruous and imbricating them into the nation.

However, there was quite apparently no consensus as to how this process should be undertaken. For example, in 1965, H V Kamath asked for a clarification from Gulzarilal Nanda, if it was plausible that the government could be intentionally disallowing any exhibits or statues of Subhash Chandra Bose in the city.³² Subhash Chandra Bose and his disagreements with the Congress in general and Gandhi in particular, did not fit very well with the nationalist history scripted by the Congress. There were therefore several allegations regarding Bose’s omission from this history and especially from the history of the Red Fort where Bose’s Indian National Army (INA) had unfurled its flag for the first time. The omission of Netaji’s voice and the INA’s marching song from the *Son-et-Lumiere* spectacle at the Red Fort also became a matter of debate in Parliament.³³ At one point there was even an allegation by H V Kamath that the government had refused permission to install or exhibit pictures of Bose in government buildings, offices and premises, which was reflective of a larger unwillingness to acknowledge his contribution to the national movement in the Congress.³⁴

Producing a National Iconography

Nehru presciently pre-empted the dangers that could have arisen if the state went ahead on a reckless mission to “nationalise” the space in Delhi. Faced by several demands for memorials and statues for several freedom fighters and martyrs from all sides, the plan to make an All India Memorial was floated. Govind Ballabh Pant (the then home minister) and B N Datar (the then deputy home minister) clarified that the All India Swatantrata Sangram Memorial must signify “the great and determined march of the people of India towards Independence led by Mahatma Gandhi and ten or eleven unidentified persons representing men and women from different parts of India and different walks of life”.³⁵

It was only Gandhi's figure that could have risen above controversy. The Indian national movement was never a homogeneous movement. To pick out 10 or 11 leaders of the movement representing all strands of the movement would have been extremely controversial. The discussions in Parliament regarding the erection of new statues always tended to be inconclusive and vague. The safest bet was always Mahatma Gandhi, who enjoyed something close to a universal acceptability among the Indian population. It was only Gandhi's statues that the central government did not dither from contributing monetary help to. In fact, the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act has limited the reproduction of Gandhi's name and image.

The colonial busts and statues were meanwhile uprooted from various points of the city and kept in the Coronation Park, which was the site of all the three coronation durbars. Located on Burari Road, which is far beyond the Delhi University area in north Delhi, it now occupies a corner that is almost totally ignored. Pushed into historical and geographic oblivion, lying in absolute disrepair, the park rarely finds mention even in the exhaustive lists of tourist spots in the city. As already mentioned, these statues never found a place in the National Museum and the special museum meant to house them never came up. They were concealed from the city's inhabitants as they were made oblivious to the city's history. A city which takes great pride in its history has to a great extent erased a significant part of it. An American newspaper which carried a story about Coronation Park dolefully commented, "Hidden in an overgrown marsh on the northern outskirts of Delhi, the magnificent marble figure of King George V presides over a mortuary of other British Raj statues that have been banished there from prominent perches across the capital".³⁶ It is only of late that the park has started getting a little attention. It was planned to be restored by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) before the centenary of Delhi Darbar in 2011.³⁷

What this section clearly indicates is how what we consider a "homogeneous" official national account, has never been official. The debates in Parliament on what statues could possibly come up in the city as markers of the new nation, tell us how the contours of what could become the official narrative and what could not were debated upon and remains fraught with inconsistencies till today. While the parliamentarians were absolutely clear that the foreigners' statues had to go, a consensus on which statues should be in the city and where was not possible. The debate on Swami Shraddhanand's statue or the furore over the exclusion of Subhash Chandra Bose's from Red Fort tell us how the contours are themselves unsettled and contested. The official national account, and the heroes in this account, lay contested, that the central government had to keep itself out of this form of iconography. What I have attempted to put together in these three sections is how the city space was slowly changing shape from being a symbol of imperial grandeur to a city with an iconography of an indigenous kind. My attempt has been to map the various modes through which this iconography was being produced.

Conclusions

The aspect of investment into a physical space by state power, which is seen to be common to both colonial and postcolonial state power, leads us to think about the ways in which power is constituted and reconstituted through space. Important to our narrative is the fact that these transformations in the post-colonial city were happening in the backdrop of a nation which was attempting to find its way and a city trying to cope with the huge wave of migration after the Partition. While the unruliness of the city was being tackled at another level, the question of what these enclaves of state power should "look" like also gained prominence. Though it was impossible to remove the debris of the colonial past in the city, the question of removal of certain physical elements of that past was considered highly significant. It is for this reason that the amorphous category of "national culture" became extremely important in this decade. However, what really constituted this "national" was never fixed. There was no well formulated policy on national culture until recently. The contentions that arose over colonial statuary are one aspect of how these spatial practices became fraught with problems. Nehru and other parliamentarians could never principally agree on what was to be done with those statues. It is for this reason that most of the answers to questions in Parliament on public statuary were evasive in nature. These statues were more than mere objects of stone. They symbolised the colonial history of the very institution of Parliament itself, while for Nehru they still held importance with regard to India's relationship with Britain. The intention was to claim these institutions of the colonial past as completely "national" institutions of the new polity. Srirupa Roy's work, though insightful, ends up treating the category of "official nationalism" as a monolithic body of "Ideas" (Roy 2007). She locates the discourse at the level of the state and the citizens. What I have tried to argue here is that even the Nehruvian state cannot be treated as a homogeneous category. There are therefore, evident tensions in the way that official nationalism came to be defined. Taking this even further, it becomes difficult to ascertain whether the parliamentarians demanding statues of specific leaders should be treated as elements of the state or the society. It is these contradictions that went on to establish the aesthetics of the modern nation state in a way.

Thus, specific places in the city were turned into stages for the spectacles of the state. What must be noted are the constant references to the "premodern" in the institution of the modern nation state here. Jim Masselos writes how Nehru's speech from the Red Fort on 15 August 1947 immediately fixed the relationship between the state and its subjects as that of *Darsan* (Masselos 2009). This same mode is exercised in the way the Republic Day parades are conducted to this day. There is a mode of "seeing the state". What this paper has intended to do is to take these "sights of the state" seriously in the form of monuments and statuary and understand the spatial practices of the state itself. Though one must clarify that what is being analysed here is not the production of a generic state but a state of a very specific kind, the Nehruvian kind. It is quite

clear, therefore, why Nehru feared a similar celebration of human beings. In a modern nation state such a celebration could be allowed only to the nation state, and not an individual, who could substitute the metaphorical "body of the king" (Kantorowitz 1981). This explains Nehru's enthusiasm for the Republic Day celebrations, which could not be replicated when it came to the statues and busts of leaders. The "body of the king" thus became secondary to the body of the modern nation state. The body of the modern nation state as embodied in the Republic Day parade, or the National Museum became a means to legitimise the nation by extension of the state. For many, now the question was no longer rooted in aesthetics or to represent a specific form of state power. The elected representatives in Parliament frequently demanded putting up public statues of people who clearly did not fit in the framework of official nationalism, and yet were entirely outside the domain of nationalism. They would often place these demands as being "demands of the common people". The entire project of national "place making" that was underway in the city, therefore never adhered to one definition of the nation. In a

way, official nationalism became amorphous entity, whose boundaries had to be constantly protected, by raising technical objections. The aspiration for creating spectacles was therefore not a prerogative of the state. With Independence and no policy formulation on these aspects, the legislative assembly debates came to offer a rich field for an analysis of the different interests and motivations in terms of making a place.

Though the city was still within the framework of the "world as exhibition" what is interesting to note is how the terms and conditions of these exhibitions were being changed (Bennett 1994). The secular, rational and modernist ideal was constantly challenged by attempting to define the places differently. Very often, the notion of the "rational", "modern" nation was premised on the aspects of collective rituals. The factor of "theatricality" that many scholars like Clifford Geertz have gone on to ascribe to monarchies, can go to a great extent to define the modern nation state as well (Geertz 1980) and the very fact that statecraft is a "thespian's art" and cannot be performed without a stage (ibid: 120). It was the city-space of New Delhi which emerged as the stage in this period of the nation's postcolonial life.

NOTES

- 1 See Christopher Pinney, *Photos of Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2007) and Patricia Uberoi, "Feminine Identity and National Ethos in Indian Calendar Art", *Economic & Political Weekly*, 28 April 1990, pp WS41-WS48.
- 2 The Dominion Pillars were built as important symbols of Britain's particular notion of constitutional reform in India. David Johnson (2008) writes that though they did not directly raise India to a dominion status, they directly alluded to the intentions of Round Table Conferences to do so soon. Baker made them on the lines of Asokan Pillars who inscribed his laws on stone columns.
- 3 On Public Library see *Lok Sabha Debates*, Part I, Vol IV, 12 August 1950, p 527. On Rajghat, see Rajghat Samadhi Bill, 5 June 1951, Vol 12, Part II, pp 10241-257. The debates on the form and the design of Rajghat were on one hand trying to negotiate with Gandhian Philosophy and on the other, trying to ordain it with a sacral status.
- 4 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Part I, Volume V, 29 September 1954, pp 1841-42.
- 5 The exact location of the statues of Lord Hardinge and Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson Could not be found, though details of its removal were found in *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XXII, 27 November 1963. However, it is my guess that the two statues at Great Place were of these two people.
- 6 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XXVII, 13 March 1959, p 6066.
- 7 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol I, "Motions for Adjournment", 13 May 1957, pp 73-74.
- 8 "Policy Regarding Foreign Statues", *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (hereafter, *SWJN*), Vol 38, pp 170-71.
- 9 Quite interestingly, Bhakt Darshan (an MP from Garhwal) was born in the year 1912. In the honour of the king and the queen, his father named him Raj Darshan as the coronation durbar had just taken place. Later, under the influence of Gandhi, Nehru and G B Pant he changed his name to Bhakt Darshan.
- 10 Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Datar's reply on 23 March 1961, Vol LII, p 6750.

- 11 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol LIII, 7 April 1966, p 9883 and *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XXXIX, 10 March 1965, p 3405.
- 12 *Lok Sabha Debates*, 31 July 1956, Part I, Vol V, pp 625-26.
- 13 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol LIX, 27 November 1961, pp 1511-12.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XLVIII, 24 November 1965, p 3510 (translation mine).
- 16 Ibid, p 3508 (emphasis mine).
- 17 These three statues were removed only in the year 1964.
- 18 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol LIII, 7 April 1966, pp 9883-84.
- 19 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XLVI, 16 September 1965, p 5922.
- 20 Municipal Corporation of Delhi was opposed to this move of the government and had issued a decision to this effect. The reason, however I have been unable to find.
- 21 In a letter to Satya Narayan Sinha, Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs on 23 April 1958 in *SWJN*, Vol 42, p 855.
- 22 List of Statues and Portraits in Central Hall, Parliament House, Parliament of India, <http://164.100.47.132/LssNew/our%20parliament/List%20of%20Statues%20and%20Portraits.htm> (accessed on 1 April 2011).
- 23 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XXIII, 20 December 1968, pp 123-24.
- 24 Letter to Shri Ranjan dated 7 May 1958 in *SWJN*, Vol 42, p 858.
- 25 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XV, 11 April 1958, p 9427.
- 26 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XLIV, 19 August 1965, pp 848-49.
- 27 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XLII, 14 April 1960, pp 11664-66.
- 28 Swami Shradhdhanand (1860-1926) originally known as Lala Munshiram was one of the leaders of the Arya Samaj. He was at the same time known to be quite tolerant and had preached on one occasion in the Jama Masjid in Delhi. He was assassinated in Delhi on 23 December 1926 by a Muslim "fanatic". Erecting a memorial in Chandni Chowk could have led to some discordance between Hindus and Muslims as

Chandni Chowk had (and still has) a very high density of Muslim population.

- 29 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XLII, 14 April 1960, p 11666.
- 30 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol LII, 21 March 1966, p 6670.
- 31 Ibid, p 6671.
- 32 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XXXIX, 10 March 1965, p 3404.
- 33 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol V, 27 June 1967, pp 7816-17.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol XXXIV, 8 September 1959, pp 6846-48.
- 36 "In the Graveyard of Empire, Role of Raj Questioned", *Dallas Morning News*, 5 September 1993.
- 37 "Coronation Park Heading for a Desi Face-Lift", *Times of India*, 28 February 2011.

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